Daniel Bernard Rodriguez Creative/Artistic STEP Proposal

Daniel Bernard Rodriguez  
The Ohio State University  
(330)417-3288  
rodriguez.559@osu.edu

Prepared for:  
Dr. Bernadette Vankeerbergen  
The Ohio State University STEP Program

Program Summary: Combining aspects of the aesthetic and the realistic, this project will culminate with the writing and (vanity) publication of a book comprised of short stories. This undertaking will allow for creative expression and growth, as well as an opportunity to practice effective communication, both of captivating stories and interesting concepts.

Wednesday, April 1st, 2015
Description of Project:

A simple description of this endeavor is that I will be writing a book. Specifically, it will eventually become a book of short stories. I believe that this format is both important and definitive of the project, in that by writing short stories versus a full-scale novel, it allows for more stories/perspectives to be explored. Each of these stories will present a character or characters, young or old, big or small, who are undergoing some form of a trial, dealing with a problem, or simply enjoying a normal day. I plan to leave the majority (if not all) of the characters nameless, and in this way I hope that they will be more relatable to the reader. In remark to the idea of no names, this “blank slate” approach would seem to allow for one to make his or her own judgments about an individual based strictly on context, and not some predetermined notions of an individual based on their name. Since these are short stories, there is not much time to deal with extraneous detail. I plan to utilize rich descriptive text to create immersive environments into which the reader can implant themselves and their emotions, if only for a moment. In my eyes, the key to writing a good story, long or short, is that the reader can vividly visualize a scene or a character because of the author’s delicately selected words and descriptions. An author is a painter with words, and his work should most definitely portray him as such.

More importantly, however, the stories will make sure to incorporate realism into most every aspect. There must be a central theme or motif that radiates throughout the body of the work, and this idea should be evident to the reader by the conclusion of the story. Whether it be joy, love, loss, or redemption, one should be able to see at the end of each story that the author had an agenda in mind. Emotions are a powerful tool to possess, and from the perspective of the author, the story will fall flat and fail unless one can muster some emotional response from within the reader. I want to make people laugh. I want to make people cry. I want to make people feel. I wish to create an escape into another time, another place, and to have this be a meaningful experience for the reader.

As an added feature to the book, I would very much like to add a small section of poetry and other short essays, offering perspective and commentary on various different ideas. I do not want this project to be any one thing. In my eyes, I hope for this piece of literature to tell many different stories using a purposeful variety of styles. When spoken, no story is ever told the same way twice; intonations may fluctuate and the place of its telling may change from time to time. However, the substance remains the same. In this same way, I want to illustrate this in my book.

This project will be a creative and artistic one, allowing me to venture outside of my communication major and genuinely express my love of writing. Clearly, it fits nicely into this artistic category, as it would create opportunities for me to continue my involvement in an activity, such as creative writing, that is somewhat unrelated to my professional goals at the moment. In terms of courses that could be taken to complement my endeavor, I possibly see myself taking a creative writing course sometime in the near future, possibly even picking up a creative writing minor in the upcoming autumn semester. As a theatre minor, I both read and see many plays, allowing me to bear firsthand witness to a powerful art medium, both from present and past. I could definitely translate some of those techniques of monologue, character development, and narrative into my own work.

In regards to a timeframe, I believe my project to be quite feasible from start to finish. I have already completed two of the stories that I hope to include in my book, along
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by the end of the 2015 autumn semester. On the counsel of Professor Herman, I quickly realized that my preconceived notion was unrealistic. She mentioned that authors pour a great deal of time and effort into their work, a reality that would be hindered by classes and a demanding summer job. If I truly wish to be a serious author, then my behavior and work ethic should reflect that aspiration. To remedy this dilemma, the STEP funding will be used in a somewhat unconventional way: to reimburse what would have been the wage from my job. Instead of working in an office setting, I will be dedicating 6-8 hours daily to the elaboration of my book. The salary that I would have received as result of my job will essentially be returned to me in the form of STEP funding. More specific budgeting details are outlined below in the appropriate subsection of this proposal.

As far as the overarching meaning behind this project, I truly believe that it will be immensely rewarding and enjoyable to complete this endeavor. Up to this point, I have found that it has been great fun to write these stories and I cannot wait to tell many more. By the end of the process, once the last word has been penned, I know that this will have been a worthwhile and transformative experience. I plan to fine-tune my writing style and technique, as well as to expedite the amount of time that it takes me to write a short story, or anything for that matter. This venture will force me to become dedicated to a writing regimen, but more importantly, to be committed to the idea of finishing an extensive project such as this. I wish to emerge from STEP as an individual who is capable of expressing his ideas vividly and more effectively than ever before.

To help me along with this process, I have consulted with my grandfather, who has published several books in the past, one of which also consisted of short stories. I plan to use his advice in how I pace myself when I write, as well as how to find enjoyment in every little detail of the tedious editing process and beyond. On the recommendation of Dr. Vankeerbergen, I recently met with Michelle Herman, MFA Director of Creative Writing at Ohio State. Professor Herman is an accomplished writer who has written two novels, and her short works of fiction and essays have been featured in American Scholar, O, The Oprah Magazine, The Southern Review, and many other journals. With a body of work of her caliber, she was able to offer some valuable insight into relevant styles of today, as well as some more specific details into the business of publishing itself. More importantly, however, she basically solved the problem of allocating funding for my project. Until this meeting, I figured that it was a reasonable goal to have the book written and published by the end of the 2015 autumn semester. On the counsel of Professor Herman, I quickly realized that my preconceived notion was unrealistic. She mentioned that authors pour a great deal of time and effort into their work, a reality that would be hindered by classes and a demanding summer job. If I truly wish to be a serious author, then my behavior and work ethic should reflect that aspiration. To remedy this dilemma, the STEP funding will be used in a somewhat unconventional way: to reimburse what would have been the wage from my job. Instead of working in an office setting, I will be dedicating 6-8 hours daily to the elaboration of my book. The salary that I would have received as result of my job will essentially be returned to me in the form of STEP funding. More specific budgeting details are outlined below in the appropriate subsection of this proposal.

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**Personal Statement:**

For as long as I can remember, I have been writing; a pen has never been too far from my grasp. It truly is magical how writing can make an idea tangible on paper, and even more so, it is incredible to think that your stories, your words, can have an impact on another person. Coming from a family of immigrants, I learned the value of communication at an early age, and not exactly in English at first. To me, my parents were examples from the beginning that a story is not about the language in which you present it, but how you choose to tell it, and the emotion. “There is a bright spark of creativity in us all”, they would tell me, “and you must not let it burn out.” So I took their advice, and blossomed it into a childhood full of writing and storytelling. My teachers in elementary school began using me as the model in class; I would read my stories aloud and the feeling was unlike anything else in the world. This encouragement led me to compete in statewide writing competitions, which then translated into accolades, and in turn spurred me to further develop my passion for writing.

I have always found a certain indescribable comfort in the pen, in the beauty of a word, and to this day that has not changed. Today, I can assuredly say that I am a more confident individual because of my familiarity with writing. Although just a hobby now, STEP provided the perfect opportunity to take the next step with my craft, and to undertake the inception, development, and creation of a book. I have always dreamed of writing a book, and it is exhilarating to think that within a year, it may very well be within my grasp. This year, I became a communication major, and I found that to be one of the very best decisions that I have ever made. I wholeheartedly believe that this project will help me to understand what effective communication truly is, how it is achieved, and the hard and tedious work required to make it a reality. Writing this book will undoubtedly enhance and enrich my time at Ohio State by illustrating what it means to be dedicated to a goal, to a lifelong project. Looking at myself now, I think that law school may be looming in the near future, and this endeavor will help hone my writing skills for the vast body of written work that is associated with practicing law as an attorney. Therefore, I look forward to the intellectual stimulation that will come from writing a significant amount, knowing that it may very well be preparing me for the rest of my life. Personally, I hope that this undertaking challenges me to be frustrated, to feel lost, to fail, and hit a brick wall. All of these tribulations will only serve to enhance my ability to face adversity and to rise up unbroken, as a better person and a better writer.

Furthermore, I have met some wonderful individuals thus far because of STEP, and I intend to meet many more as I continue to develop my project. While this may be to fulfill a personal lifelong aspiration, it would be unwise to assume that this endeavor is only about a book; the scope of it is much greater than just that. It is about the people around me, everyone who is helping to make this a reality, and all those who I will meet as a result. New friendships have been forged while participating in this program, and I hope to keep in touch with everyone who has positively touched my life. I am sure that great networking will come from this opportunity, and I am excited at the thought of who I might come into contact with, and what new stories I may learn.

So to close on the idea of “stories”, I may be writing a book full of them, but this entire STEP program has been a story all its own. It has improved my experience at Ohio State, as well as broadened my personal, social, and intellectual horizons. I look forward to
what the future holds, to how my book will conclude, and to how this chapter of my life will affect the remainder of my college career, and beyond.

**Budget:**

Over the summer, my initial intent was to work as a medical receptionist at the Aultman North Canton Medical Group, which is the clinic where my father is a practicing physician. Originally, I was planning to work at a $12 hourly wage, 15 hours weekly, for 11 weeks. At this rate, the weekly income would total $180, which then translates to **$1980** over 11 weeks. The exact timeline/work schedule is outlined below:

| Week 1: May 11-15 | Vacation: June 29-July 3 |
| Week 2: May 18-22 | Week 6: July 6-10 |
| Week 3: May 25-29 | Week 7: July 13-17 |
| Week 4: June 1-5 | Week 8: July 20-24 |
| Week 5: June 8-12 | Week 9: July 27-31 |
| Vacation: June 15-19 | Week 10: August 3-7 |
| Vacation: June 22-26 | Week 11: August 10-14 |

As mentioned earlier in the proposal, the STEP funding will serve to reimburse the salary that I would have collected at the Aultman North Canton Medical Group. Rather than working in the clinic environment, I will be focusing my time and efforts into the writing of my book, full time. The STEP program will allow me to have the luxury of this time to express my love of writing, and to not have to worry about scraping together the funds that I will lose by not working. These funds will then go directly toward my college tuition, as was my original intention for the earnings from the summer job.

**Reporting Back:**

In terms of reporting back, I plan to accomplish this in various ways. First and foremost, I very much intend on keeping in contact with Dr. Vankeerbergen and updating her with all developments that I experience while working on my project. She will be the first to know of my progress and if I would happen to run into any problems. Of course, there will be other ways that I can report back to the university directly, as with u.osu.edu, where I will eventually post blog-style entries to reflect on my STEP experiences. Eventually, I intend to present my finished book at the STEP Expo or some similar sort of setting. This way, I will be able to illustrate and explain to others all the planning and execution that went into making my book a reality.